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ABSTRACT

If counselors and other mental health professionals are to improve service delivery to women, research must provide a thorough understanding of the facets of counseling that are most beneficial to women. To help in this endeavor, the relationship between female counselor variables and the evaluation of counseling effectiveness by female clients are explored here. For this study, 7 White American and 12 African American undergraduate students, ages 19-23, role played as clients and were asked to complete 4 person-variable measures. Nineteen White American graduate student counselor trainees, ages 23-41, also completed the measures and were asked to role-play a session with "clients." Results indicate that a feminine sex role was significantly and positively correlated with a more positive self-concept for all "clients" and that no person-variables predicted perceptions of counselor effectiveness. However, counselors' self concept served as a predictor of counselor effectiveness with African American women. Further, feminine sex role and a more engaging interpersonal style were highly correlated with internal locus of control for White American women. Finally, a more interactive interpersonal style was significantly correlated with a more positive self concept for African American women. White American women's highly engaging interpersonal style was significantly correlated with an internal locus of control. Contains 14 references. (MKA)

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Counseling Women: Who is Most Effective?

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Abstract

The current study examines the relationship between female counselor person variables and the evaluation of counseling effectiveness by female clients. Subjects were White American (WA) and African American (AA) undergraduate students who participated in role plays as clients and who were asked to complete four person variable measures. WA graduate student counselor trainees also completed the measures and were asked to role play a session with 'clients'. Results indicate that a feminine sex role was significantly and positively correlated with a more positive self-concept for all 'clients' and that no person variables predicted perceptions of counselor effectiveness. However, counselors' self concept served as a predictor of ratings of counselor effectiveness with AA women. Further, feminine sex role and a more engaging interpersonal style were highly correlated with internal locus of control for WA women. Finally, a more interactive interpersonal style was significantly correlated with more positive self-concept for AA women and WA women's highly engaging interpersonal style was significantly correlated with an internal locus of control. Implications for research and mental health practice are discussed.

Counseling Women: Who is most effective?

Introduction

The existent literature on counseling women suggests that there are issues and concerns unique to the experience of counseling women. Much of this literature is an outgrowth of the feminist movement and suggests that there are "ways of being" in counseling that more appropriately "fit" women's behavior and psyches. Mary Lee Nelson (1996), suggests that, "...the fundamental goal of counseling or therapy with a woman would be to allow for maximum self-definition without invalidating her relational inclinations within the context of the of the counseling relationship or outside of the relationship" (p. 341). As such, it is often proposed that counselors use a more relational approach to counseling with women. The literature on counseling women has been developed primarily from a feminist perspective and is generally theoretical in nature. As such, it treats women as a monolith and does not account for diversity within the gender. This notion of generality is a major criticism of the feminist movement and hence feminist counseling/counseling designed for women. In fact, many women of color would argue that they do not view themselves as part of a political group termed feminist and therefore do not believe that the feminist movement addresses their needs. Further, many women of color have criticized the feminist movement and the field of mental health for their lack of attention to issues of diversity regarding class, race, and culture (King, 1988). The author bell Hooks is quoted in agreement with this idea and states that, "No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. ...[we are recognized as] a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture. ...and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women." (p.7).

Within the field of counseling, it is important to consider the effects of theory on practice. Specifically, if counselors and other mental health professionals are to improve

service delivery to women, research must provide a thorough understanding of the facets of counseling that are most beneficial to women. Unfortunately a dearth of research exists in the area of counseling outcomes with women clients. There are many reasons that might explain why this is the case, with one of the most compelling being that the nascence of the movement has afforded little opportunity for testing the theories. However, there are a few studies in existence that have attempted to understand the impact of feminist ideology, gender, and counseling techniques designed for women on counseling outcomes. Of the literature that does exist, the following outcomes have been reported. There appears to be inconclusive evidence that gender alone is a primary factor in positive counseling outcomes for women. In other words, matching women clients by gender has not been definitively proven to enhance counseling outcomes. Indeed, "gender matching alone does not adequately predict counseling process and outcome" (Blier, Atkinson, & Geer, 1987, p. 27). Further, much of the literature on counseling process and outcome with women states that the sex role and/or personality characteristics of the therapist and client are better predictors of counseling outcome with women clients than gender matching alone. Snell, Hampton, and McManus (1992) examined the impact of both counselor and client gender on the willingness of clients to discuss relationship/interpersonal topics and found that counselor gender and gender matching did not produce statistically significant results. In addition, they found that specific personality characteristics of the clients, as opposed to solely client gender, affected clients' willingness to report on intimate interpersonal topics. Finally, regarding client gender, the most significant finding of this study revealed that women clients were more likely than male clients to discuss intimate interpersonal topics with counselors of either gender.

It is important to note that of the literature that does exist with regard to counseling outcomes with women, little if any accounts for the cultural, socioeconomic and racial diversity of the group. This fact, is of course in agreement with the major criticism of the feminist movement in general. Few of the aforementioned studies utilized African

American, Asian/Asian American, Native American, or Hispanic American/ Latinas. In addition, little mention was made of the socioeconomic status of the women surveyed and where this information was included, most subjects were reported to be middle class college students. In the research where women of color were included as subjects, their numbers were small and seldom representative of their status in the general population. How women of color have been accounted for in the counseling literature is through the multicultural forum. In the field of multicultural counseling, research has suggested that ethnic matching can be beneficial for clients (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995). Others have suggested that cross-culturally competent counselors regardless of race can be effective with people of color (Sue & Sue, 1990). It is equally important to consider these facts in the context of counseling women to adequately account for within group diversity.

Given the aforementioned facts, it appears to be important to consider if counseling outcomes do indeed differ with the use of new techniques and theories developed specifically for women. In essence, the question that needs to be addressed is, do counseling outcomes differ with regard to the multiple variables that are purported to be beneficial for women in therapy. Further, do these differences apply to women as a group or are there within group differences (e.g. racial and cultural) that heretofore have not been isolated.

The following study was designed to test the notion of who is most effective in counseling women. It was hypothesized that women in general would respond favorably to women counselors judged by ratings of counselor effectiveness. Further, it was hypothesized that based on racial and cultural within group differences, women of color would differ with respect to ratings of counselor effectiveness. Specifically, given the use of White American counselor trainees in this study, it was hypothesized that African American women would rate counselor effectiveness differently than White American women. In addition, it was hypothesized that White American women would rate counselors as more effective than African American women given the salience of the

racial/cultural matching factor. Finally, it was hypothesized that counselor and client behavioral/sex role and personality characteristics would influence ratings of counselor effectiveness.

Based on the limited research available, it appears that there are certain characteristics of both counselors and clients that affect the counseling process and outcomes with regard to women. This study attempts to pinpoint the counselor characteristics that women clients view as being most effective. Further, this study seeks to address personality characteristics of women clients that affect counseling outcomes.

Method

Participants

Participants were 19 white female counselor trainees who were currently enrolled in an accredited master's level school and community counseling program in a large midwestern state university. Students were enrolled in a counseling laboratory class and volunteered to participate in the study as a means of receiving additional feedback prior to enrollment in counseling practicum. Role playing clients were 12 African American women and 7 White American women who volunteered to participate in this study and who were currently enrolled as undergraduate students in the same university. The age range for the counselor trainees was 23-41 the age range for the role playing clients was 19-23.

Measures

The Fundamental Interpersonal Relational Orientation Behavior (FIRO-B) (Schutz, 1977) is a 54-item, Likert scale measure that assesses interpersonal style. The degree to which individuals express and want from others on the following is assessed: Inclusion (the degree to which one moves toward groups of people), Control (the degree to which one assumes the leadership role within groups of people), and Affection (the degree to which one moves into intimate and close relationships with others in groups of people). Higher scores are indicative of greater degrees of actively engaging others.

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1964) is a 100 item, Likert scale measure designed to reveal individuals' perceptions of themselves via observations of self in five general categories including physical self, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self, and social self. These items are scored to produce an overall self-esteem score and a complex self-concept profile.

Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) is a 29 item measure designed to assess an individual's perception of events as being caused by his or her behavior or by events outside of his or her control.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1978) is a 60 item measure that treats masculinity and femininity as separate dimensions and allows individuals to select for a determination of androgyny.

The Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS) (Atkinson, 1983) is a 10 item, Likert scale measure that measures individual's perceptions of counselors on the dimensions of expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness.

Procedure

All counselor trainees who were enrolled in a counseling laboratory class were offered as one of their opportunities for extra points to participate in a study of counseling process. Of the 21 who were enrolled in the class, all chose to participate in the study as an alternative to writing a paper addressing a critical issue in counseling process research. (Two of the students were male, and though they chose to participate, their packet information was not included in this study.) After the completion of the research packets; which included a consent form, a demographic sheet, and each of the measures indicated above; times were scheduled for 20-25 minute counseling session, at the convenience of the trainees. Additional incentive for these trainees was the opportunity for feedback on the resulting audiotapes of their sessions.

In a separate session, the role-playing clients were given the same research packets and assigned to a counselor trainee. Trainees were told that they were to use this session as an opportunity to practice use of basic microcounseling skills in the development of rapport and a clarification of the clients' presenting problems. Sessions were to last no longer than 20-25 minutes and each of the sessions was audio-taped for discussion and feedback at a later date.

Role-playing clients volunteered to participate and were prompted to present the same problems to each of their prospective counselors. The presenting problem was concern over having just been informed of having a chronic sexually transmitted disease and not knowing how to share this news with a new boyfriend or with others in her future. "Clients", each using the same pseudonym, completed a Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale after the counseling session and returned them to the researcher. Higher scores on the Counselor Effectiveness Scale were indicative of a more positive experience for the 'client'.

No identifying information was requested on the measures. Counselor Effectiveness Ratings Scales were coded by indicating '1' for African American female clients, and '2' for White American female clients. Research packets were maintained in a locked cabinet for the purposes of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

T-tests analyses were performed in order to examine the differences between the African American and the White American role-playing client samples on each of the variables included in the study. Pearson product correlations were used in order to examine the relationships between each set of variables within the whole group of women, and for Black and White women separately. Multiple regression analyses were used in order to examine the contribute of the independent variables (i.e., self-concept, interpersonal style, sex-role identity, and locus of control) to the dependent variable of client perceived counselor effectiveness (CERS).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and the results of t-test. T-tests indicated no significant racial differences between the means on any of the variables studied, including locus of control, counselor effectiveness, sex role orientation, or self-concept. On the person variables examined in this study, there were no significant differences between African American and White American characteristics of the role-playing clients.

Table 2 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis with counselor effectiveness as the dependent variables and the counselor's 'person' characteristics as the independent variables for both African American and White American role-playing clients. The model nor any of the variables examined in this study were found to significantly predict counselor effectiveness. In addition, significant and positive Pearson product correlations were found between femininity and self-concept ($r = .50$; $p = .03$). There were no significant relationships found between any of the other variables examined for all women in this study.

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis with counselor effectiveness as the dependent variable and the counselor's 'person' characteristics as the independent variables for only African American role-playing clients. Though the entire model was not found to be a significant predictor of counselor effectiveness ($F = 1.82$; $p = .24$), self-concept was found to be a significant predictor ($T = 2.56$; $p = .04$). In addition, interpersonal style and self-concept were positively and significantly correlated ($r = .62$; $p = .03$). Results indicated that interpersonally engaging Black women tended to also have a more positive self-concept. No other significant correlations were found.

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis with counselor effectiveness as the dependent variable and the counselor's 'person characteristics as the independent variables for only White American role-playing clients. The entire model was

not found to be a significant predictor of counselor effectiveness and, unlike the African American women, neither of the individual independent variables were found to be significant. In addition, locus of control was found to be positively and significantly related to both interpersonal style ($r = .92$; $p = .003$) and femininity ($r = .76$; $p = .05$). White American women who had more of an internal locus of control tended to also have a more engaging interpersonal style (FIRO-B) and be more feminine (Bem).

Discussion

Though findings did tend to support the initial hypotheses stated, it is important to note that no significant differences were found between the African American and White American role-playing clients on either of the variables examined. Why? One possible explanation might have been that all of these women were academically successful undergraduate students on a predominantly White campus.

However, as predicted in the introduction, there were significant differences in possible cues that influenced perceptions of counselor effectiveness between African American and White American women, as well as differences in relationships between the person variables examined. These findings suggest that even when African American and White American women share characteristics on standardized tests, how these characteristics are manifested may be unique. Specifically, for African American women, counselors' self-concept was significantly positively correlated with ratings of counselor effectiveness. On the contrary, none of the variables assessed proved to be predictors of counselor effectiveness for White American clients. In addition, African American women's interpersonal style was significantly positively correlated with self-concept. This was not true for the White American women in this study. For White American women, a more engaging interpersonal style and femininity were positively and significantly correlated with an internal locus of control. Though no significant differences were found between the two groups, how the variables related were different.

The stark difference between the general finding when both groups are collapsed and that of the individual findings when results for African American and White American women are viewed separately, suggest the necessity of examining within group diversity existing in each group in order to best understand the 'culture' and the day to day experiences and manifestation of characteristics that might be shared across groups. (For example note the idea that African American women are often perceived as "naturally assertive" while White American women are often perceived as quite cooperative in interpersonal relationships). These researchers strongly recommend future studies to include respectfully in the research design efforts to address individual differences between and within groups of women. It appears as with all other racial/ethic groups, femaleness is not monolithic in character or manifestation.

There were other interesting findings that are worthy of mention and that reiterate the diversity within the group entitled women. Note that gender alone was not demonstrated to be a significant factor in predictions of counselor effectiveness as some studies have demonstrated and as has been asserted in the feminist counseling literature. It is indeed important for counselors (including women) to be aware of their own interactional styles with different groups of women such that they recognize the need for and incorporate varied skills in working with the diverse group heretofore entitled women. As mentioned in the introduction, the feminist literature suggests a relational approach when working with women and even though the findings from the study seem support that notion, what the literature fails to address is what behaviors should be used to express such an approach given the diversity of the group. A final finding of import includes the interesting finding for White American women that a relationship exists between femininity and internal locus of control. Why is it that past research has readily suggested that masculinity is linked to an internal locus of control and in this study such was not the case? Future research should seek to address this question. Regarding the limitations of this study, a few notions are evident. First, the small and unequal sample sizes of the African

American and White American women may have contributed to the variance in examined differences. Second, given that there were no significant differences between the women on any of the variables examined, other unexamined factors must have contributed to group differences. Third, as mentioned earlier regarding most of the process and outcome research on counseling women, this was an analogue study instead of a genuine counseling situation. Finally, this study was conducted on one university campus and within one training program which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

It is important for women to receive attention in the process and outcome research in the mental health professions. As has been demonstrated in this study, however, it is imperative for researchers to begin to examine the within group variance that appears to be a salient characteristic of this group.

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Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, and T-test Results for Role Playing Clients on Model Variables

	African American n=12			White American n=7			
Variable		M	SD	M	SD	t	
Counselor Effectiveness	72.1	14.7		82.7	24.1	-1.06	
Femininity	61.3	4.39		61.3	8.46	.01	
Masculinity	81.8	7.45		82.6	11.9	-.16	
Interpersonal Style	228.7	20.2		216.7	19.3	1.28	
Locus of Control	10.0	4.89		8.29	3.73	.86	
Self Concept		148.3	9.63		152.1	11.6	-.75

Table 2.

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis to Predict Counselor Effectiveness with All Role Playing Clients

Variable		B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Femininity	.33	1.15	.11	.29	.78	
Masculinity	-.01	.66	-.003	-.01	.99	
Interpersonal Style	-.07	.32	-.08	-.23	.83	
Self Concept		.13	.71	.07	.18	.96
Locus of Control	.27	1.38	.06	.19	.84	

Note: No variables of the model significantly predicted counselor effectiveness

Table 3.

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis to Predict Counselor Effectiveness with African American Role Playing Clients

Variable		B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Femininity	-1.34	.99	-.40	-1.14	.22	
Masculinity	-.11	.56	-.05	-.20	.85	
Interpersonal Style	-.58	.26	-.79	-2.19	.07	
Locus of Control	.42	.85	.14	.49	.64	
Self Concept		1.49*	.58	.98	2.56	.04

*p<.05

Note: Although model variables were not found to be significant in predicting counselor effectiveness, counselor self concept was found to be a significant predictor of counselor effecttiveness with African American women.

Table 4.

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis to Predict Counselor Effectiveness with White American Role Playing Clients

Variable		B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Femininity	1.77	5.04	.62	.35	.78	
Masculinity	-1.13	1.22	-.56	.93	.52	
Interpersonal Style	1.12	3.12	.90	.36	.78	
Locus of Control	-1.22	22.1	-.19	-.06	.96	
Self Concept		-2.49	1.7	-1.19	-1.47	.38

Note: No variables of the model significantly predicted counselor effectiveness